

OF CONFIRMATION.

698. P. 8

With a PRAYER Before and After.

I. IT is well known, that Baptism is an Ordinance which Christ hath appointed; for admitting Persons into Covenant with God, and into Fellowship with the Christian Church. And because this Ordinance was taken from the *Jews*, among whom Children, as well as others, were admitted into Covenant; because also Children are as capable of being received into Covenant with God, among Christians, as they were among the *Jews*, and Christ hath no where excepted them; because the Scripture (1 Cor. vii. 14.) supposes a peculiar Holiness in the Children of Christian Parents, which the Children of Heathens have not; and lastly, because it would not be agreeable to the natural Tenderness of Parents, nor to that Concern which they are bound to have for the Welfare of their Children, to defer their Admission into Covenant with God longer than they are fairly capable of it: For these Reasons Infant Baptism hath been the Practice of the Church of Christ; and our own particular Church hath declared in her Articles, *That the Baptism of young Children is in any wise to be retained, as most agreeable with the Institution of Christ.*

II. The Practice of Baptizing Infants being thus supposed; their Part of the Covenant, which is Faith and Repentance, cannot be performed but by the Declarations and Promises of others; and these Declarations and Promises which are made by others, being only intended to supply the present want of Understanding in the Infants, cannot be supposed to suffice longer, than such want of Understanding continues. Which shews how fit and proper it is, that Children should make the same Declarations and Promises for themselves, and in their own Persons, as soon as they come to a competent Age and Knowledge. Their being then unable to make them, was the only Reason why they were not then required to make them in Person; and if they had been then able, and yet had refused to make them, they could not have been received into Covenant at all. If therefore, after they are grown to Maturity, and are able, they neglect to inform themselves in the Christian Religion, and refuse to make proper Declarations of Faith and Obedience; this looks too like a renouncing the Covenant that was made for them, and a giving up their Title to the Benefits of it; which are no less,

than the Forgiveness of Sins, the Grace of God, and everlasting Life.

III. Accordingly, the Church requires of the Parents, and others who made the Covenant in the Name of the Children, to see that they be instructed betimes in the Knowledge of the Christian Religion, and of all such Things as are to be believed and done by them, in pursuance of that Covenant: Particularly, that they be taught, as well the solemn Promise which was then made in their Name, "That they should renounce the Works of the Devil, the Vanities of the World, and the sinful Lusts of the Flesh," as the Necessity of their resolving to make good that Promise in the Course of their Lives, if they hope to receive any Benefit by having been entred into Covenant with God.

IV. For these Ends our Church hath prepared a CATECHISM, or Form of Instruction, to be learnt by Children; and lest Parents and Sureties should neglect their Duty herein, every Minister is also ordered to instruct and Examine them. Which Order was very necessary in former Days, when few Parents were able to instruct their Children, and there were few Schools to which they could be sent for Instruction: But now, that Parents are generally more knowing, and Schools far more numerous than in former Times, it is become the ordinary Duty of Ministers, not so much to teach them, as to examine how well they have been taught. Upon which I would make these two Observations; the first, That since Children have now better Means and Opportunities of Instruction, than in former Days, a greater Proficiency in the Knowledge of Religion may in Proportion be expected from them; and the second, That since Ministers are now eased in great Measure of that Part of the Work which depends upon the Memory, it may reasonably be expected from them, that they apply with greater Diligence to the Understandings of Children, by such easy Explanations, as may let them into the Sense and Meaning of what they have committed to Memory, and lead them to further Degrees of Christian Knowledge: Inasmuch as these Instructions of Children, whether by Parents, or Sureties, or Ministers, are preparatory to their Confirmation by the Bishop, that is, to a more solemn Entrance into Covenant with God, upon their own Knowledge

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Knowledge and Choice, and upon a Belief that it is their Duty and Interest so to do: All which is not a Work of the Memory, but the proper Work of the Understanding; not the being able barely to say their Catechism by rote, but the giving some Proof that they understand the Principles and Duties of Religion.

V. The Rite of CONFIRMATION or laying on of Hands, for which Children who have been already baptized are to be thus prepared, is of ancient Use in the Church of Christ; and is supposed by many to have risen from the Practice of the Apostles, *Acts* viii. 14. and xix. 6. where we read, that when *Philip* the Evangelist had converted and baptized the *Samaritans*, the Apostles sent unto them *Peter* and *John*, to pray for them, and to lay their Hands on them; and that, after certain Disciples at *Ephesus* had been baptized, *Paul* laid his Hands on them. And what we read, *Heb.* vi. 1, 2. of *laying on of Hands*, as one of the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ, is generally supposed to refer to this Rite, because of the Order in which it is there placed; that is to say, immediately after *Repentance from dead Works*, and *Faith towards God*, and the *Doctrine of Baptism*: Repentance and Faith being the Preparations for Baptism, and Baptism itself being there followed by the *laying on of Hands*; according to the known Usage of the Church in this Matter, from the Beginning of Christianity.

VI. It is true, indeed, that the Practice of the Church hath varied, as to the Circumstances of this Rite, and the Age at which it hath been administered. But there is one Circumstance, which hath been generally the same in all Times, namely, the considering it as a Preparation to the highest Office of our Religion, the Holy Communion. And accordingly, it is an Order of our own Church in particular, *That none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be Confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be Confirmed.* This is a public Testimony which the Church requires, of the Fitness of young Persons to be admitted to the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood; and on their Part, the joining in that Holy Office with the faithful Servants of Christ, does as it were complete, and bring to full Effect, their Admission into the Congregation of Christ's Flock at their Baptism. And if Parents would, in their own Minds, always join together the Thoughts of their receiving Confirmation, and of receiving the Holy Sacrament, as we see the Church in all Ages hath joined them; they would not be so zealous to

bring their Children to be Confirmed, so long before they can possibly think them fit to receive the Sacrament; nor so indifferent, after they are Confirmed, whether they ever receive it or not.

VII. It would, doubtless, be a great Means of rendering this Rite more useful to the Ends of Piety, and the Administration of it more solemn and orderly, if Parents were taught to reason rightly in this Matter; that is, if their Desire of seeing their Children Confirmed, were always accompanied with a Desire to see them at the Lord's Table, and with a sincere Intention and Resolution to make them Partakers of that Holy Ordinance. The Age indeed for Confirmation, in Compliance with the received Practice, is usually fixed at *fourteen Years*, yet it were to be wished that Parents would be persuaded to think the Age of *Sixteen* a more proper Time for their Children to be Confirmed, when their Understandings are more ripe, and they are fit to be admitted to the Holy Communion, and Ministers may reasonably expect, as a Testimony of their being fit to be Confirmed, that they declare their Intention to come to the Lord's Table, at the next Opportunity that shall offer after their Confirmation. For as no Person can be supposed to take upon himself his Baptismal Vow *seriously* and *in earnest*, who is not also desirous to renew it from time to time at the Holy Communion; so the plain Reason why such Numbers of those who are Confirmed, do afterwards utterly disregard the Lord's Table is, that they are Confirmed so long before they are really fit to come to it, and either do not know or forget, that one end of their Confirmation was to prepare them for it.

VIII. This, if it were duly considered and practised, would be a great Benefit to Religion; and so certainly is the due Performance of this Rite of Confirmation, in many other Respects: As it is the Means of keeping up among us the Practice of Catechising, and the Occasion of bringing both Ministers, and Parents and Children, to comply with that excellent Institution, by way of Preparation for this ancient Rite: As it obliges young Persons to make a public Renunciation of all sinful Courses; and is a solemn Dedication of themselves to the Service of God, and gives religious Thoughts and Desires an early Possession of their Hearts: As it is the Means of making them consider and understand their Baptismal Vow, and of obtaining Supplies of Spiritual Strength to perform it, by the Prayers of the Faithful, accompanied with the Imposition of Hands; which

which hath been ever used both among Jews and Christians, as a solemn Rite of Dedication and Blessing: And, finally, as all this is performed at an Age, which on one hand is not yet corrupted with the Habits of Sin, and so is most capable of such Religious Impressions; and on the other hand, is the Time of their Entrance into the World, when they have great Need to be armed by wholesome Instructions and spiritual Preparations of all kinds against the manifold Temptations which they will meet with in it.

IX. A due Sense of those great Benefits, together with the Reasonableness of obliging Children, when they come to Age, not only to understand the Conditions upon which they were received into Covenant with God, but also to ratify with their own Mouths the Engagements and Promises which were then made in their Names; a just Sense of these Things, I say, hath induced some of the most eminent Protestants Abroad, and particularly Mr Calvin*, to speak with great Respect of this Rite of Confirmation, duly and regularly

administred, and cleared from the Superstitions of the Church of Rome. And it is to be hoped, that a like Sense of these Benefits will engage Ministers, and Parents, and all others who are concerned, zealously to discharge their several Parts towards the useful and orderly Performance of this Work; more especially, in taking Care that the Children be duly prepared, first by a distinct Understanding of their Baptismal Vow, and an Enquiry into the Breaches which they have been already guilty of; and then by due Expressions of Sorrow and Repentance for those Breaches, and serious Resolutions of Obedience for the Remainder of their Lives: Not doubting, but that God will accept and reward this Zeal in Ministers and Parents, for the Enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ against the Powers of Satan; and will also continue and confirm these good Dispositions in the Children, by such Supplies of his Holy Spirit, as he shall see needful, to arm them against the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

* Institut. Lib. IV. Cap. 19. N. 4. *It was (says he) an ancient Custom, that the Children of Christian Parents, when they were grown up, should be presented to the Bishop, that they might perform what was required of Persons who offered themselves to be baptized at an Adult Age.—Forasmuch therefore as being baptized in their Infancy, they could not then make Confession of their Faith before the Church, they were, about the Conclusion of their Childhood, or at their Entrance into the State of Youth, brought before the Bishop by their Parents, and examined by him in a Catechism, which they had in a certain Form of Words. And that this Action, which on all Accounts ought to be grave and sacred, might have the greater Reverence and Dignity, the Ceremony of Imposition of Hands was likewise used; and so the Youth, after his Faith was approved, was dismissed with a solemn Benediction.—Now, such an Imposition of Hands as this, which is used purely as a Blessing, I commend, and wish it were restored to its primitive Use.*

A Private Prayer which may be used by one who intends to be Confirmed.

O Almighty God and merciful Father, through whose gracious Providence over me I have been admitted into thy Church by Baptism; pardon, I beseech Thee, all my Breaches of that holy Covenant into which I was then entred. And now that I intend to renew the same in my own Person, and to take my Baptismal Vow upon myself; be Thou graciously pleased to strengthen me with thy holy Spirit, that I may be enabled to perform it; mortifying all my evil and corrupt Affections, and growing daily in Grace and Goodness; that living here as becomes a true Member of Christ's Church, I may hereafter be admitted into the Society of Saints and Angels, to live with Thee, World without End. *Amen.*

A Form of Thanksgiving which may be used in private after Confirmation.

MOST Gracious God, who keepest Covenant with them that love Thee, and walk before Thee with their whole Heart; I praise thy holy Name for the Opportunity I have enjoyed of dedicating myself to Thee and thy Service in the Presence of the Church. Do thou, O merciful FATHER, who hast hitherto preserved me in Body and Soul, so strengthen and direct me by the gracious Influences of thy good Spirit, that I may constantly profess thy Truth unto my Life's End, and keep a Conscience void of Offence towards Thee and towards Men; and, having walked in Newness and Holiness of Life, as becomes a Member of Christ's Church, I may at length partake of that Life and Immortality which he brought to Light through the Gospel, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, World without End. *Amen.*



OF
Confirmation.

With a

PRAYER

Before and After

N. B. To be distributed as the
Minister of each Parish shall
think proper.